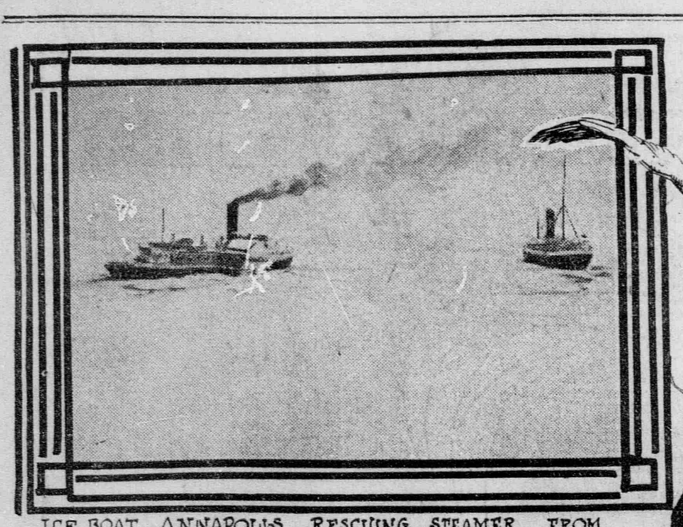
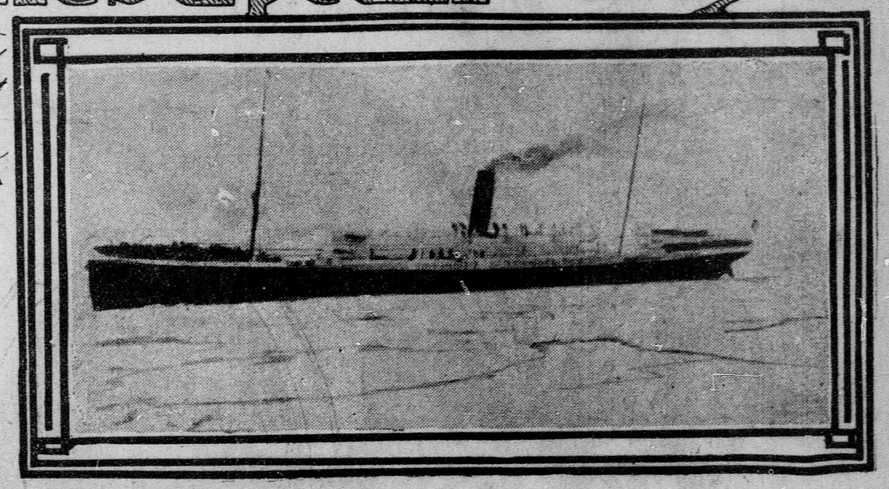
Life Saving in the Frozen Waters of Chesapeake Bay



ICE BOAT ANNAPOLIS RESCUING STEAMER FROM A LARGE FLOE



ICE BOUND WITH FATHER FOR THREE WEEKS

CAPTAIN JAMES E. GRIGGS.

STEAMER CROWDED WITH IMMIGRANTS FAST IN THE ICE.

State of Maryland and City of Baltimore in Charge.

Maintain Powerful But Homely Vessels for Service.

Rescue Many Oystermen Who Get Marooned by the Ice.

FROM massive, crushing floes of ice, from death by starvation and exposure, the iceboats, Annapolis and Latrobe, rescue scores of frost-bound oystermen in Chesapeake bay each winter, and save thousands of dollars to the shipping interests of the country.

Powerful but homely craft, the two Maryland iceboats are the only ones of their kind in this part of the world, though there like is to be found in some of the ports of Russia, where ice forms during a large part of the year, and which, unless kept free, would be as useless to commerce as a single glove to a man with freezing hands.

The waters of Chesapeake bay are sluggish, its tides and currents are not as swift as those of many more Northern ports and harbors. Consequently it is comparatively easy for the waters of the bay to freeze again and again during the winter months, and if no steps were taken to keep the channel open shipping would necessarily be abandoned. Thousands of dollars in trade would be lost to Baltimore and Annapolis. Washington, too, would feel the effects of such a calamity.

Steaming through icy waters, grinding and smashing huge fields of ice day after day is the task of the two sturdy boats. Each day, each hour, is of importance in this work, for ice is like a nouveau rich—give him an inch and he will take an ell, and the more solid the mass of ice becomes the more difficult it is for the boats to dig a passage through it.

Baltimore owns and operates the Latrobe, while the State of Maryland built the Annapolis and pays her running expenses. Usually the boats go into commission January 1, though if the weather is such as to warrant it, may do so in December. The Latrobe stays in commission all the year round, and in the summer carries the poor of Baltimore far down the Chesapeake for a breath of fresh air. Both iceboats are veterans, the Latrobe having served nineteen years and the Annapolis for fifteen.

Scarcely two weeks ago thirty men were stranded far down the bay. Thick ice held them fast. While it was only a mater of ten or twelve miles to safety they might as well have been stuck in the great floes in the Arctic circle. No one could reach them to bring them aid, nor could they escape from their icy prison. For fourteen days they had been waiting and hoping for a warm wave which would loosen the ice and permit their escape in their small boats. Provisions ran lower and lower. Slowly but surely they were being brought to the point of starvation. Some of them had had nothing to eat for several days except bread and water, and precious little of that. Fifteen had only six pounds of flour left among them, while the whole crowd depended upon melted snow for their drinking water. For fuel they had what driftwood they could dig out of the ice, a few crab shanties built on the salt marsh where they were marooned, and their boats. The cold was intense. Already they had torn away part of the scanty shelter for the fire which must not be allowed to die.

Salt Ice a Poor Diet.

They were oystermen who had ventured far out from the mainland and Deals Island to dredge for the succulent bivalve. One night there came a storm, a cold wave, and the next day the men were penned in the thick ice. There was nothing for it but to wait for outside aid. The average oysterman is a pretty tough proposition. He is used to weather of all sorts, and has an absolute contempt for "fair weather sailors." He takes things as he finds them. If all the tales told of them are true, many of these men are little better than pirates, and take things wherever they find them. But even an oysterman and a pirate cannot live on a diet of salt ice. Their case was desperate, and in a day or two they would have been compelled to choose between starvation and cannabalism.

As the days went by and no news of the stranded men came to their friends the fear arose that they had perished in the ice. Some of them had wives and families looking to them for support.

Although the thirty men were all stranded in what is known as Great South Marsh, an immense salt marsh southwest of Deals Island, they were not in one party. Fifteen Crisfielders were together on that side of marsh cut by Kedges strait. The other fifteen, in two parties, one of eleven and the other of four, were miles away farther up Tangier sound and nearer Deals Island.

A hurry call was sent to Baltimore by the people of Deals Island. Fifteen of their men, they said, were in great danger, and all attempts to send relief from the island failed. After a rush meeting of the harbor officers orders were wired to the Annapolis, which was lying off Annapolis, to proceed immediately to the relief of the stranded men. No word, however, reached Captain Griggs, the Annapolis commander of the marooned Crisfielders.

Rescuers Themselves Caught.

The story of the rescue might well figure in one of Clark Russell's tales of the sea. Mile after mile the iceboat tore its way through the thick waters of the bay. The weather was bitter cold and a heavy wind was blowing across the ice. Time and again the Annapolis would be brought almost to a dead stop by the thick ice, back off, and smash into the heavy cakes again. As long as the iceboat kept to the channel there was little danger to her, but it was necessary to feel a way through the shoals when well down toward Great South Marsh. Captain Griggs determined to fight his way through Hoopers straits to the place where the Deals Island men were lying helpless. Suddenly there came a long heave and the boat stopped. It was not ice this time. The Annapolis had run aground almost within striking distance of its goal. The rescuing party were themselves prisoners.

Then began a long wait for the flood-tide which should free the iceboat. It was trying to the men there to save others whom they knew to be in a desperate condition. With glasses the Annapolis could be seen from Deals Island, and the islanders almost gave up hope of a rescue being effected when they realized that the Annapolis must be aground. Their spirits sank still lower when on the flood the iceboat backed slowly out and turned in another direction.

But the rescuing party had not given up, only chosen a different course. Soon afterward the Annapolis entered Kedges strait, another path to the lost oystermen. The change in course meant twenty miles more of hard going and this in shoal water.

Was it Providence?

Was it providence which made a change in course imperative? Who knows? Men have such a habit of charging odds and ends up to providence that when a true bill comes along it is sometimes hard to find a sign check. No matter what it was that made the Annapolis steam through Kedges strait, fifteen Crisfielder oystermen were saved as a result of the changed course who might otherwise have starved to death. For the iceboat had gone but a few miles through the strait when the lookout spotted several small boats and a signal of distress on a distant shore. Rigged up on a sweep was an old sheet, and with the glasses it was possible to see a number of dark figures running about the shore trying to attract the attention of the men on the steamer. Some of them took off their coats and waved them frantically, some climbed out on the bowsprits of the boats and beckoned with their arms.

The steamer whistled encouragement to the castaways. Immediately there was a rush for the cabins of the ice-bound boats to collect what belongings could be carried away. Two men pushed a small skiff over the ice to open water, clambored in and pulled for the Annapolis. Four others ran as far up the shore as they could to wave a welcome to the rescuing party. Lifeboats were lowered from the iceboat and then began a long pull through the icy water in the teeth of a wind that cut like a knife.

A Pitiful Sight.

It was a pitiful sight that awaited the rescuers. Men with haggard, pinched faces, covered with scraggly beards, and sunken eyes gave proof of the awful experiences through which they had just passed. They fought to get into the boat which should take them from the ill-fated island. They crowded the lifeboats until there was danger of their being swamped. Finally, however, they were all taken off to the Annapolis and to dinner. How those men did eat. Fortunately a large supply of provisions had been taken abroad to meet just such an emergency.

But the work of rescue was not all completed. It was thought at first that the fifteen men picked up in Kedges strait were the Deals Islanders to whose aid the Annapolis had been summoned. But a few words with the half-starved men showed that this was not the case. There was nothing for it but to continue the search. After hours of ramming the ice boat broke its way into Tangier sound and with the aid of glasses two more signals of distress were discovered. They were at least a mile apart on the edge of the marsh and proved to be the fifteen oystermen from Deals Island. Again the lifeboats were manned and again the scene of rescue was enacted. This time, however, the crew of the ice boat had the aid of the Crisfielders who were eager to lend all the assistance they could to men whose plight they knew only too well.

Do Their Work Modestly.

This is a fair sample of the work which the Annapolis and Latrobe are called upon to accomplish during the winter months. Plodding steadily along these two boats make many rescues, soon forgotten by all except those directly connected with the rescue. They modestly do their duty and if lives and property are saved the captains and their crews think little about it and say less. It all goes down as part of the day's work and no one thinks anything more of digging a steamer crowded with immigrants out of the ice than of sitting down to dinner. There is no flurry, no blowing of trumpets when it is all over. The men who are engaged in the work have never received medals nor do they expect to. Already on board the Annapolis the crew is making a joke of the rescue of the thirty oystermen in Great South Marsh. Hanging to a nail in the engine room is a large round paper medal which purports to be awarded to one of the rescuing party from the governor of Maryland.

"See my medal," says Chief Engineer Poole, with a smile on his good-natured face almost as broad as his rotund self. And if there are any of the rest of the crew present there is a general laugh. Making a joke of a brave deed is a healthy sign. It means there are no swelled heads and that the deed can be repeated again whenever there is need. It is like drawing teeth to get stories out of these men of the lives and vessels they have rescued.

Go out aboard one of the Chesapeake Bay ice boats on a stormy day. It does not take long to find out that shipping on one of these craft is no easy birth. Only the kind of man who can whistle "In the good old summer time" with the thermometer registering zero and a gale blowing thirty miles an hour need apply. Any one else who signs to sail with one of the ice boats would stand as good a chance of a freeze out as the young man who asks a pretty girl for a kiss. Men who have served on the Annapolis or the Latrobe are well trained for an exposition to find the North Pole.

Captain Griggs Blown Up.

Capt. James E. Griggs, commanding the Annapolis is a typical harbor pilot. As he puts it, "I was born in Baltimore, but raised on Chesapeake Bay." And this is strictly true for the first shipped on the bay sixty-five years ago, when he was only thirteen years old. Since that time he has been almost constantly on the water, most of the time serving as a pilot. Today at seventy-eight he is as hale and hearty as a man thirty years his junior. He commanded two other iceboats in the bay before he took the Annapolis, and altogether has been in command of an icebreaker more than thirty winters.

"The first craft of this kind I had was the Chesapeake," said the captain to a Times reporter. "She blew up," he added quietly as though to be blown up was an everyday occurrence with him. "She blew up shortly after we left Baltimore one morning in December, 1873. We had just begun to break through a heavy field of ice when she went up. Four men were killed and another badly hurt. The boat took fire and burned to the water's edge. We escaped from the burning steamer in the lifeboats. Why did she blow up? Why, she just naturally blew up. Too much steam aboard for the boilers, I reckon.

"The Maryland was the next iceboat I took. She was sold afterward. Neither one of these boats was as large as the Annapolis, but were much on the same plan. They were not built for beauty, but they could cut through the ice in good shape. Speaking of getting through the ice, I have heard a good deal of talk about these boats running up on the cakes and breaking a channel by sheer weight. It sounds well, but it isn't so. No, sir, we cut through the ice, butt right through it. When the ice is about twelve inches thick we have all the work we can do to get through it. The Annapolis has fought its way through many heaped-up cakes, however, by persistent ramming."

Although the Annapolis is too heavy and unwieldy to get up any great speed, she can make twelve or thirteen knots in open water and can go at a fair rate through six inches of ice. So thick was the ice in part of the course she sailed over to rescue the Deals Islanders that it took nine hours to go twenty miles. The Latrobe recently had a similar experience with thick ice when it took seven hours to make two miles.

Not Ornamental But Useful.

Broad in the beam, with immense side wheels, the iceboat is far removed in appearance from the steamers to whose rescue she goes daily. But though she is not built for beauty, she is built for business, particularly the ice business. Her hull is coated with two-inch plates of iron and in the bow a double thickness is used. The lines of the bow curve upward something like the bow-end of an egg. This makes it impossible for the boat to get a down tilt, no matter how thick the ice may be upon which she runs. Indeed, she rides well up on the ice and crushes it down as she breaks through. The paddle wheels, churning the broken cakes of ice into a white mass which looks for all the world like a creme de menthe frappe, are bound with iron. Even so the strain upon them is so great that they are frequently broken.

The Annapolis numbers thirty-three souls all told. The officers are Captain Griggs, First Mate W. H. Stark, Quartermaster Julian Woodford, Assistant Quartermaster Marion Woolford, Chief Engineer Poole, and First Assistant Engineer John Bias. Owing to the size of the engines a large part of the crew are employed on the engineer force. For the Annapolis boasts two surface condensing engines each capable of producing 1,400-horsepower. The engine room takes up a large portion of the boat, and in the boiler room it is as hot as Tophet, no matter what the temperature be on deck. To generate the steam necessary to run these huge engines, no less than twenty tons of coal are used each day. The gross tonnage of the boat is 877 tons, which, by the way, is enough to make any self-respecting cake of ice fade away as though struck by a breeze from the Sahara.

Digs Out Twenty Vessels a Day.

If you ask Captain Griggs what the duties of the Annapolis are he will answer: "To keep the channel open between Baltimore and Annapolis." He may neglect to tell you how many steamers he rescues from the large fields of ice every day, but if you press him on this point he will tell you, "Twenty or thereabouts." Starting out as soon as it is light, either from Annapolis or Baltimore, the iceboat cuts her way to the first vessel which is seen caught in the ice. If the ice is too heavy for the vessel to break her way to port by the path which the iceboat has already opened, the Annapolis turns and convoys her as far as necessary to make her entrance sure. If not, and the vessel can make the harbor unaided, the Annapolis continues on her way to the next in need of assistance. Sometimes she may loosen the ice around a whole fleet and convoy them to port.

Capt. James E. Griggs a Typical Harbor Pilot.

Has Been in Command of Iceboats for Thirty Winters.

Often Digs Out a Score of Vessels in a Day.

Tramp steamers ladened with all sorts of merchandise, fruit boats, whalebacks full of oil, passenger steamers, in fact, nearly all vessels which enter the bay during the winter months claim the aid of the Latrobe or of the Annapolis. Oyster boats and schooners that venture occasionally into the long bay are dug out. These operations mean thousands of dollars saved to the companies to which the ships belong. For not only do they mean a large saving in provisions, but they mean that the vessels are not permitted to drift at the mercy of the wind and tide. If caught in a large floe of ice they drift hither and thither, it is not only possible, but highly probable, that they would be carried aground and seriously damaged. In the case of the smaller boats the Annapolis and Latrobe save them from being crushed by the ice, thus saving not only property, but the lives of human beings.

Seven-Year Old Girl Rescued.

A case in point occurred recently. A schooner was caught in the ice well down the bay. For days she lay helpless. Finally the Annapolis reached her and took her into port. Had the schooner been left much longer to her own devices undoubtedly her sides would have been crushed by the ice which was massing about her and the lives of her crew would have been lost. Another schooner was picked up by the iceboat off Drum Point. On board the schooner was the captain's daughter, little Miss Meeks, seven years old. For three weeks she had suffered the hardships due to exposure with the rest of the crew.

In spite of their protecting armor and their ability to break a way to port at any time, the iceboats are by no means free from danger themselves. Scarcely more than a week ago the Latrobe, while convoying a fleet of ice-bound boats to Baltimore, was run down by the steamship Fernfield, which was coming slowly in the wake of the iceboat. The Latrobe had found it necessary to back out to ram a floe of heavy ice a second time when the accident occurred. The big steamship crashed into the port side of the iceboat, smashed the port guards, and tore up the decking. It was feared at first that the iceboat had been seriously damaged, but she limped back to port unaided.

Stories Told of and By Members of Senate and House

JOINED IN LAUGH.

Irate Driver Turns Parson's Admonition Not to Swear Into a Good Joke.

One of the best stories of the season is told by Senator Blackburn of Kentucky. A number of years ago, he says, there was an old fellow who drove a bus for one of the hotels in Louisville, and he could "cuss" by note. One morning the weather was cold and frosty, the streets not in the best condition, and the old man had considerable difficulty in getting a frisky young mare to do her part in pulling the bus. The old driver ripped out oath after oath, and one of the passengers, a clerical gentlemen, entered a protest, telling the driver to be patient and that the skittish young mare would do her duty.

"P-p-p-a—ti—e-n-t, h-h-e-l—l," stuttered the old man. "G-g—i—i—t up, d-d—a—mn y—o—u you."

"Don't swear, my good friend," put in the man with the sanctified look. "Job was a good man and a man of patience."

"W-ho t-t—the h—e—ll d-d-d-id he dr-i—v-e f-f-for?"

"This was more than the protesting passenger could stand and he was forced," adds the Kentucklan, "to join in the laugh."

CANNON DOUBTS IT.

Chicago a Wicked City, But This Too Much.

Speaker Cannon confesses that Chicago is a very wicked place, but says he does not believe the story to the effect that a gentleman wrote to a bookseller in the Windy City asking for a copy of Farrar's "Seeker After God" and received the reply, "There are no such persons in Chicago."

LIKE QUEEN ANTS.

Lincoln's Comparison of Justice Miller and His Gown to a Well-Known Insect.

It is related that at the second inaugural ball of Mr. Lincoln he was talking to Charles Sumner when Justice Miller came up and Mr. Lincoln, after greeting him cordially, said:

"How are the justices and their gowns?"

Justice Miller replied that they were all right, and Mr. Lincoln went on:

"Miller, you were brought up on a farm, weren't you?"

"Yes," replied the justice, "and I sometimes wish I had remained there."

"Well, Miller, you must have seen the clearing up of new ground and burning of timber. You have seen the heavy bark fall from the trees and half decayed logs, while out from under the bark would come great winged ants, which would waddle off with the funniest kind of clumsy dignity. Do you know, Miller, I never see one of you justices with your gowns on but that I am reminded of those funny little ants."

OPERATION EXPENSIVE.

Tale of Stingy Man Saved From Hanging—Rescuers Cut the Rope.

All yarns about stingy men have been shelved. Representative Moon of Tennessee has given out one which takes the bakery. He says he knew of a man who lived in an adjoining State who made an attempt to shuffle off this mortal coil because he was too stingy to eat enough, and when he was discovered and cut down the first words he uttered after being resuscitated were:

"Why did you cut that rope? Couldn't you have untied the knot?"

COLOR OF THE LEGS.

Negro Preacher Who Was Not Posted on Marks of Black Spanish Chickens.

"Just so long as watermelons grow negroes will eat them," says a Representative from Alabama, "and just so long as fat chickens roost within reaching distance of a darky the chickens will come up missing.

"An aged negro was arraigned before a trial justice for lifting chickens. The old fellow had a number of witnesses on hand to prove that he was a member of the church in good standing, and that he had plenty of fowl of his own.

"What kind of chickens do you raise?" asked the justice.

"De black Spanish, sah," was the answer.

"Yellow legs?"

"No, sah."

"What color, then?"

"Kinder black, sah; 'bout black as yer hands, sah."

"The old man lost out on this break, and got three months."

HONOR NOT HURT.

Judge Slipped, However, and Injured Head.

Senator Depew fathers this story:

Many years ago a judge of the supreme court of New York, distinguished for his great learning, as well as for impetuosity of temper and celerity with which he dispatched business, was one day wending his way to the courtroom when he fell on the icy pavement. A lawyer who practiced before the judge went to his assistance, and asked:

"I trust your honor is not hurt?"

"No, by gad, sir, my honor is not hurt, but my head is, and I don't want any sympathy either, sir."

TOO MUCH GRAMMAR.

Educated Servant Who Did Not Sweep Out the Corners.

This good story touching the servant problem is told by Representative South of Kentucky:

"I recently heard of a well-known resident of Washington who permitted a true and tried servant of the African persuasion to visit her old home in South Carolina. She had been a faithful servant for many years, and the white folks thought it would be a great treat to send her back to Dixie to see her people.

"To take Aunt Hattie's place a substitute was employed, a mulatto girl who had been liberally educated. She performed the duties in a rather indifferent manner, and when Aunt Hattie returned after a month's absence she began her tour of inspection to ascertain how her work had been done. The faithful old soul was disgusted with the evident want of cleanliness manifested everywhere. Finally she went to the lady of the house and gave vent to her feelings by declaring:

"'Miss Martha, I'se disgusted, I is. I knowed dat you couldn't git grammar an' clean corners out of the same nigger.'"

IRON AFTER BRASS.

Humorous Epitaph Found Upon Blacksmith Shop Once a Lawyer's House.

One of the epitaph collectors of the House produces this one, which, he says, was found printed or painted on the corner of a house which was formerly occupied by a lawyer-politician, but was then being used as a blacksmith shop:

This house a lawyer once enjoyed;
A smith does now possess.
How naturally the iron age
Succeeds the age of brass.

PROFESSIONAL TONE.

Undertaker Whose Instructions Nearly Ruined His Reputation.

"We had an undertaker who did a good business in one of the towns of my State," says Representative Moon of Tennessee, "and he had a commanding presence and a complete mastery of that most difficult of all facial expressions and 'tone' which all leading undertakers must have.

"On one occasion this gentleman was presiding at a funeral and after a critical inspection of the corpse and the splendid line of coaches drawn up in front of the church, he entered the chancel and requested the congregation to remain seated while the family and intimate friends 'passed out and loaded up.'"

BELIEVED IN GOD.

How Old Red Jacket Silenced the Justice in a New York Court.

Senator Burton of Kansas tells this story about old Red Jacket, the Indian, General—then President—Grant made head man of Indian affairs.

Red Jacket was being examined as a witness in one of the county courts of New York State, when a lawyer asked him:

"Now, my good Mr. Red Jacket, you seem to be an expert testifier, and I want to ask you a simple question, but a very important one. That question is this: Do you believe in God?"

Red Jacket straightened himself up to his full limit, and looking with piercing eyes at the lawyer, answered:

"Does Red Jacket believe in God? Yes, Red Jacket believes in God much more than he who can put such a question."

It is perhaps unnecessary to say that the attorney quickly said that he was through with the witness.